

First Friends Church, a Quaker meeting
Rev Dr. Loletta M. Barrett
Affirmation Sunday
Psalm 89:1-2, 14-18, Psalm 90:1-6, 12
September 13, 2020

Psalm 89:1-2, 14-18

I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations. I declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you. Happy are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O LORD, in the light of your countenance; they exult in your name all day long, and extol your righteousness. For you are the glory of their strength; by your favor our horn is exalted. For our shield belongs to the LORD, our king to the Holy One of Israel.

Psalm 90:1-6, 12

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. You turn us back to dust, and say, "Turn back, you mortals." For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night. You sweep them away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers so teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

Devotion

Many people use "affirmations" to uplift, encourage and provide emotional support or motivation for self-esteem purposes or to achieve a goal. But affirmation is a truly Quaker action. After being arrested, Georg Fox was handed a Bible to swear allegiance on. He opened it at the verse that read, "Swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath." Fox said, "Our allegiance [does] not lie in oaths but in truth and faithfulness."¹

In 1695, in order to overcome active resistance tying up the courts, the English "Quaker Act" allowed the "Solemn Affirmation and Declaration of the People called Quakers ... [to be] accepted instead of an oath." The evidence of a faithful Quaker is that our words and our lives are truth-filled- it is our lived testimony of integrity. If we live in honesty, an oath can add nothing to what we say.

We use affirmation in our meetings for worship with a concern for business and our committees. When we affirm something we are not voting, or giving it our approval or support because we think it is correct or a good idea. We prayerfully affirm it is truth-filled and Spirit led.

Today is Affirmation Sunday. It is a day to affirm what we find to be true in our meeting as a people who worship, learn, and serve God in fellowship. Today we affirm how our walk with God has been strengthened and enhanced by our participation as individuals and as a community together.

God does not need our affirmation, yet in joy, love and gratitude our music today praised and affirmed God's eternal presence, everlasting goodness, love, and faithfulness. As human

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-32809040>

beings we need to affirm and be affirmed. We need to acknowledge, show gratitude and actively love through our words and actions. We affirm that of God that we see in each other, encouraging and uplifting each other. We affirm what God is doing with, and through us and our meeting – what we hear the Spirit saying and where we see the Spirit moving. Today we affirm that God is indeed our source and comforter, encourager and motivator, the reason for our meeting and for each of us being.

A meeting is... a school for faithfulness, a way of directing...attention away from our self toward God...to look for the person God wants us to be, and into which we can grow... [B]eing here... part of a loving community with a common experience...gives [us] strength... to hear God and be offered a way of living through other's words.²

We will now enter a time of open worship and worship sharing together. Queries provided for your consideration: What do you appreciate most about the meeting? What memory is most dear? What brought you to the meeting? What is it about First Friends that fills your spirit? What keeps you coming back? What experience do you most treasure (past, present or future anticipation). Where did you see or feel God/Spirit at FFC recently? What is most important?

This is a time to listen to the Spirit through silence and the words Friends are led to speak. If you are led to speak, please remember to unmute your microphone and mute it afterwards. Please don't rush. Take time to listen and prayerfully consider your words before speaking. Be concise and speak only once so all who are led to speak can be heard. Let there be a pause between speakers so what is spoken can take the journey from our ears to our minds, and have time to settle in our hearts and embrace our souls.

² John Punshon, Encounter with Silence, Quaker Life Winter 2020 (paraphrased)